Organizational Climate Changes Over Time

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A decade ago Andrew Halpin and Don Croft reported their seminal research on the organizational climate of schools.[1] A product of that research was the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ). Analysis of the responses to the questionnaire results in a description of the school's organizational climate.

The OCDQ was an attempt to provide a better measure of the climate within a school than was then available. Halpin and Croft were dissatisfied with morale as a concept and its inadequacy as a criterion of measurement of a school's organizational climate.[2] That the two researchers succeeded with the OCDQ is unquestioned. The OCDQ was welcomed by Halpin's and Croft's colleagues as a measure of the domain of organizational climate. Very shortly the OCDQ was employed by many researchers in countless situations. Despite the number of studies in which the OCDQ has been used, some of the more important research questions which Halpin and Croft raised in conjunction with its development have not been addressed.[3] One of those questions served as the basis for the research reported in this article.

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In their original study Halpin and Croft identified a profile for each school which represented the school's organizational climate. Six discrete organizational climate classifications were identified. A climate continuum, defined at one end as an open climate and at the other as a closed climate, was proposed by the researchers.[4] Halpin and Croft hypothesized that if it were possible to conduct a longitudinal study of the same schools that:

> over the course of time the differences between the first and second testing of the measures and indexes we have proposed would become more pronounced. In short, we suggest that there may exist an internal generative effect which tends to make an Open Climate become increasingly more open while a Closed Climate becomes increasingly more Closed.[5]

In other words, they suggested that the internal dynamics of a given climate would tend toward maintaining and extending itself over time. A faculty operating in an atmosphere on the open climate end of the continuum would tend to become more open, while a school with a tendency toward a closed climate would become increasingly more closed in nature. The focus of this research was on the question of organizational climate tendencies over time. Using Halpin's and Croft's statements regarding climate tendencies, it was hypothesized:

> Schools with open climate tendencies become more open over time and, conversely, schools with closed climate tendencies become more closed over time.[6]

Ancillary hypotheses were concerned with (1) organizational variables and their relationship to changes in the climates of schools over time, and (2) the race of teachers as a discriminating factor in teacher perceptions of the organizational climate of schools in a desegregated school setting. Organizational variables examined included: change in the principalship, degree of teacher turnover, change in the racial composition of the faculty, change in the racial composition of the student body, and changes in the sizes of schools.

Design of the Study. There are two basic ways to study changes over time—the longitudinal method and the cross-sectional method. The longitudinal method utilizes the same subjects over time, whereas the cross-sectional method compares the results using different subjects over time.

Since turnover in personnel is the rule rather than the exception among school faculties, it was impossible to conduct a longitudinal study in the strictest sense. However, the same school district and the same schools in which the OCDQ had been administered five years previously were used in this research. The organizations (elementary schools) being compared were the same. However, the incumbents in the organizations were not necessarily the same. Therefore, the study may be appropriately referred to as a cross-sectional study when individual respondents are considered and longitudinal when the schools were considered as the basic subsystem for study. Data were collected in 1966 and again in 1971.

Instrumentation. The OCDQ was developed by Halpin and Croft in a continuation of the situational approach to leader behavior which Halpin had investigated in earlier work with the Leader

Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) during the Ohio State Leadership Studies. The OCDQ study grew out of the intuitive notion that there are differences in climates between and among schools, and that these differences can be sensed as one moves from school to school. In broad terms, Halpin and Croft were attempting to establish for the school organization a means for determining the climate, which is somewhat analogous to the attempts to establish personality measures in regard to individual behavior. In discussing their work, Halpin and Croft pointed out that they were mapping roughly the same domain of inquiry that other investigators have described as morale, but they were seeking to conceptualize or map this domain in a way which would provide more heuristic value to the concept.

The OCDQ consists of sixty-four items that may be used to establish the organizational climate as perceived by the members of the school's staff. The items are answered on a four-point forced-scale: rarely occurs, sometimes occurs, often occurs, very frequently occurs. The OCDQ provides eight subtest or dimension scores. Four describe the perceived teachers' behavior: Disengagement, Hindrance, Esprit, and Intimacy. Four provide dimensions of the principal's behavior as it is perceived by the members of his teaching staff: Aloofness, Production Emphasis, Thrust, and Consideration.

These eight subtest scores are utilized through the development of a profile of the school's organizational climate to classify the organizational climate of the school on a continuum from Open to Closed. Climate similarity scores are generated which provide the mathematical basis for assigning schools to the several climate classifications. The climate continuum, as defined by Halpin and Croft, has six possible classifications (Open, Autonomous, Controlled, Familiar, Paternal, Closed) which move from the more desirable (and hypothesized) effective Open Climate at one end to the less desirable Closed Climate at the other end.

For the purposes of analyses in this study, the terms Open Tendencies and Closed Tendencies were introduced. Taking the midpoint of the continuum as the point of division, the three climates of Open, Autonomous, and Controlled were assumed to represent varying degrees of Openness. Schools perceived by their faculties as having Open, Autonomous, or Controlled climates were deemed to have Open Tendencies. Conversely, the three climates of Closed, Paternal, and Familiar were assumed to represent varying degrees of Closed Tendencies.

The Population. The population for the study in 1966 involved sixty-five elementary schools. Responding to the questionnaires were 65 principals and 1,008 other professional staff members. Teachers and other professional staff members were grouped together by school in 1966 on the basis that "others" were certified personnel and could be legitimately classified as "teachers." The same rationale was used for the 1971 data. Teachers and principals were separated for purposes of analysis for both the 1966 and 1971 data.

In 1971 there were fifty-five elementary schools in the school system. A 100 percent participation of the principals was obtained. The total number of teachers was 1,320. Of the 1,320 teachers, 1,222, or 92.5 percent, responded to the questionnaire. Since some of the questionnaires returned by teachers had missing items, forty-nine questionnaires were eliminated. Therefore, of the total number of professional staff members, question-

naires for 55 principals and 1,173 teachers, or 89.3 percent, were used in analyzing the 1971 data.

With respect to the population, there were some interesting findings which became factors in the subsequent interpretations of the results of the study.[7] In 1966, there were sixty-five elementary schools. The schools were racially segregated; seventeen schools were black, forty-eight schools were white. In 1971, there were fifty-five elementary schools and they were operated on a desegregated basis. Nine of the ten schools which were discontinued during the five-year period were black schools.

Between 1966 and 1971 there was a reduction in black elementary school principals from seventeen to three. The number of white principals increased from forty-eight in 1966 to fifty-two in 1971.

Following the desegregation of schools, black teachers became a minority in each school. The percentage of black teachers in 1971 ranged from 10 percent in one formerly all-white school to 30 percent in one of the formerly all-black schools.

Data Analysis. In investigating the principal hypothesis, the schools with open climate tendencies in 1966, i.e., schools with climate classifications of Open, Autonomous, and Controlled climates, were grouped together. Similarly, the schools with closed climate tendencies in 1966, i.e., schools with climate classifications of Closed, Paternal, and Familiar climates, were grouped together. Utilizing this procedure, it was determined that thirty-one schools had open tendencies in 1966 and twenty-four schools had closed tendencies.

After the schools were grouped in this manner, the McNemar test for the significance of changes was utilized to determine whether a significant change in teachers' perceptions of the organizational climates of the elementary schools occurred from 1966 to 1971.

The change was not consistent with the stated hypothesis. Of the thirty-one schools with open tendencies in 1966, twenty-two had closed tendencies in 1971, while only nine schools had open tendencies. Of the twenty-four schools with closed tendencies in 1966, twenty remained in the closed tendency climate classification while four schools moved to a climate designated as an open tendency climate.

To determine changes in the climates of individual schools, each of the schools within the two major groupings was assigned its appropriate climate similarity score. Assigning each school a climate similarity score provided a way to rank the schools from the most open school to the least open school. It also provided a means of determining the direction of change in the climates in schools that had the same climate classification in 1966 and 1971. For example, if a school had a closed climate in 1966 and in 1971, and if the climate similarity score was smaller in 1971 than in 1966, then the climate of the school became more closed. On the other hand, if the climate similarity score was larger in 1971 than in 1966, then the climate of the school became more open, even though the climate classification was designated as "closed" each time. In other words, the smaller the number within any given climate classification, the greater the similarity of that school's profile to the prototypic profile. The data revealed that in only twelve schools did the organizational climate move in the hypothesized direction.[8]

Inspection of the thirty-one schools with open climate tendencies in 1966 revealed that none of them moved in the hypothesized direction. There was a

change in the climate classifications in schools with open tendencies significant beyond the .001 level, but the change was in the opposite direction from that which was hypothesized. On the other hand, the data revealed that twelve of the schools with closed climate tendencies moved in the hypothesized direction, while twelve others moved in the opposite direction. The sign test indicated that the probability of a value of 12 with an N of 24 being significant was only .581, which meant that the change could be explained on the basis of chance. Since the data clearly demonstrated that the schools with open climate tendencies became more closed without exception and the change in the climates for schools with closed climate tendencies could be explained on the basis of chance, the major hypothesis of the study was rejected.

To further illustrate the change in the teachers' perceptions of the organizational climate of schools in 1966 and 1971, the schools were grouped according to the number of each of the six climate classifications at each point in time. The chi-square technique indicated that a significant difference at the .001 level existed between the way teachers perceived the organizational climate of their schools. While the majority of schools were seen by teachers as having open climate tendencies in 1966, the majority of the schools in 1971 were perceived as having closed climate tendencies. Careful examination of the data revealed the magnitude of the change in teachers' perceptions. In 1966, twenty-six schools had the open climate designation while only six schools were in the closed climate classification. In 1971, however, the reverse of this was true, i.e., only three schools had open climates and twenty schools had closed climates.

Discussion. The major hypothesis regarding Halpin's and Croft's conjecture that over a period of time schools with open climates become more open while schools with closed climates become more closed was not supported by the data in this investigation. It may be that the notion of an internal generative effect at work within an organization which tends to make open climates become more open over time and closed climates become more closed over time depends upon certain underlying assumptions about the interaction of the organization with its external environment. For example, an assumption regarding stability within the school system may be a prerequisite to such an expected outcome. The decade of the 1960s has been described as a period of rapid change and instability. This has been especially true of the American public school. It is possible that intervening variables, beyond the control of the researcher and beyond the scope of the study, had a profound impact on organizational climate changes.

Halpin and Croft suggest that there may be a relationship between the "political flavor" of a community and the organizational climate in that community's elementary schools.[9] It is unnecessary to recite the trauma which many communities experienced during the school desegregation process. The schools, of course, were at the center of the political maelstrom which accompanied the desegregation crisis. It would not be surprising if community feelings regarding desegregation were translated into overt and covert pressures leading toward more closed climates in the schools. As Halpin and Croft put it, ". . . how Open the climate of a school may be, will depend, at least in part, upon how much Openness the community itself considers 'safe'."[10]

A significant change in teacher and principal perceptions of the organizational climate of schools occurred over the five-year period, with both groups viewing the schools as more closed in 1971 than in 1966. An attempt to ferret out certain organizational variables as significant discriminants of the climate changes was not successful.

The process of school desegregation undoubtedly had its impact on teacher and principal perceptions of the climate. It is possible that the desegregation process was such an overriding issue that the attempt to identify certain organizational variables as discriminants of change in the direction of the organizational climates over the five-year period was obscured.

While a significant change in teacher and principal perceptions of the organizational climate of schools occurred over the five-year period of time with both groups viewing the schools as more closed in 1971 than in 1966, the magnitude of change was greater among teachers than among principals. In 1971, teachers tended to perceive the climates as more closed than did the principals. Since the OCDQ is a measure of principal-teacher interaction, could it be that the white principals in the school system overreacted to the desegregation process which created a difference in principal and teacher perceptions of the schools' climates? In 1966, white faculties tended to view their schools as "open," which indicated that morale in the schools generally was high, that the teachers viewed the principal as considerate, and that there was a reasonable balance in social satisfaction and task accomplishment. On the other hand, black faculties tended to view their schools as falling on the closed end of the climate continuum, which indicated that morale was low and that faculties viewed the principals as emphasizing task achievement while failing to show consideration for the social needs of the group. If the white principal did overreact to the rapid change and instability in the school system as a result of the desegregation process and became more authoritarian in his behavior, more "rule conscious," emphasizing the role expectations of the organization while minimizing the social needs of individuals within the organization, then the probability that the schools would become more closed would increase. It is possible that the teachers perceived this shift in the principals' behavior while the principals did not. If, as Halpin has suggested, the teachers' perception of the school's climate is a description of "reality," this lack of congruence in principal-teacher perceptions of climate changes could create a communication problem between the principal and the teachers in a school which would widen the gap in their perceptions of the school's climate. This condition would probably intensify the movement to the school's climate toward the closed end of the climate continuum.

Another possible explanation of the lack of congruence in principal-teacher perceptions of the schools' climate changes could be the massive teacher walkout which occurred in the entire state during this five-year period of time. It is possible that the teacher "strike" created a wedge between administrators and teachers which influenced their perceptions of organizational climate changes over the five-year period of time.

An ancillary hypothesis examined the race of teachers as a discriminating factor in teacher perceptions of the organizational climate of schools in a desegregated school setting. Previous studies indicated

that black and white teachers viewed the organizational climates of their schools differently in segregated schools.[11] It was hypothesized that the race of teachers would continue to be a discriminating factor in teachers' perceptions of the school's climate after the schools were desegregated. The hypothesis was not supported. No significant difference in black and white teacher perceptions was found in desegregated school situations. Caution is advised in the interpretation of these results, however. First of all, the perceptions of a small number of black teachers were being compared with the perceptions of a large number of white teachers in many of the schools. Secondly, it should be remembered that the black teachers constituted a minority in each school in the system following the desegregation of schools. Finally, the finding that the formerly all-white schools showed a shift in the organizational climate from open tendencies in 1966 to closed tendencies in 1971, while the formerly all-black schools were described as "closed" at both points in time offers some explanation for the fact that this hypothesis was not supported.

The research discussed in this article suggests other research questions. First, although the results of this study did not support Halpin's and Croft's conjecture that over time schools with open climates become more open and schools with closed climates become more closed, additional studies to test this hypothesis are required.

Second, the impact of the external environment, Halpin's and Croft's community "political flavor," upon a school's organizational climate should be studied. It would be of interest to attempt to determine not only the extent to which the environment influences the internal climate of the school, but also the extent to which the school can resist external pressures for conformity to a community norm.

Third, it is hoped that a follow-up study in the same school district can be conducted five years hence. In 1966, the schools were more open than closed. In 1971, the schools clearly showed a shift toward the closed end of the climate continuum. An additional study should help to ascertain whether the schools will shift back toward the open climate, remain essentially "closed," or whether a definite pattern for the schools in the district has emerged.

Finally, additional studies are needed to explore more fully the congruence of black and white teachers' perceptions of the organizational climate in a desegregated school setting. A study might be conducted in a school district where the desegregation of students and faculties had been accomplished for a number of years.

Notes

1. Andrew W. Halpin and Don B. Croft, *The Organizational Climate of Schools* (Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, University of Chicago, 1963).
2. Andrew W. Halpin, *Theory and Research in Administration* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), pp. 131-32.
3. Ibid., pp. 227-32.
4. Ibid., pp. 174-81.
5. Ibid., p. 228.
6. Thomas N. Taylor, "Organizational Climate Changes in Elementary Schools: A Cross-Sectional Study" (Ed.D. diss., Auburn University, 1972), p. 28.
7. Ibid., pp. 89-90.
8. Ibid., pp. 55-56.
9. Halpin, *Theory and Research*, p. 201.
10. Ibid.
11. J. Foster Watkins, "The OCDQ—Application and Implications," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 4 (Spring 1968): 52-54.

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